

1 Attorney Docket No. 77700

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3 RESETTABLE FUSE/CIRCUIT INTERRUPTER WITH VISUAL FAULT INDICATION

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5 STATEMENT OF GOVERNMENT INTEREST

6 The invention described herein may be manufactured and used
7 by or for the Government of the United States of America for
8 governmental purposes without the payment of any royalties
9 thereon or therefor.

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11 CROSS REFERENCE TO OTHER PATENT APPLICATIONS

12 Not applicable.

13

14 BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

15 (1) Field of the Invention

16 The present invention relates generally to fuses for
17 circuits. More particularly, this invention relates to a multi-
18 metallic heat reactive strip that snaps when conducting an
19 overloaded current to interrupt a load circuit and turn on an
20 indicator light.

21 (2) Description of the Prior Art

22 Most fuse systems in automotive electrical systems, test
23 instruments, and domestic appliances use miniature fuses that
24 fit into tight spaces. These fuses are partially made of
25 materials that melt and part when they are subjected to
26 overloads of current, and the fuses do not clearly indicate that

1 a circuit has been overloaded and broken at the fuse.
2 Consequently, operators may not be aware of the overloaded and
3 open-circuit condition until sometime much later when some other
4 event develops that will more surely attract their attention.
5 After being overloaded, the fuses with the melted materials
6 cannot be reset and must be replaced with intact units to resume
7 whatever it was that the associated circuits were doing.
8 Sometimes the replacements are not immediately at hand, and the
9 associated circuits might have to be shutdown for a considerable
10 period until replacements are located and installed.

11 Thus, in accordance with this inventive concept, a need has
12 been recognized in the state of the art for a device to
13 interrupt a circuit when subjected to overload current, to
14 provide a clearly visual indication of such overload and
15 interruption, and to have the capability to be reset to
16 reestablish a closed circuit.

17 18 SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

19 The first object of the invention is to provide a circuit
20 having a multi-metallic heat reactive strip to interrupt and
21 indicate an overload current.

22 Another object is to provide a circuit having a multi-
23 metallic heat reactive strip to interrupt and indicate an
24 overload current that can be reset after being tripped by the
25 overload current.

1 Another object is to provide a circuit having a multi-
2 metallic heat reactive strip snapped to a lamp to indicate a
3 fault condition.

4 Another object is to provide a circuit having a multi-
5 metallic heat reactive strip responding to overload current with
6 snap action to activate a lamp.

7 Another object is to provide a circuit interrupter device
8 having a multi-metallic heat reactive strip being snapped, or
9 tripped to open a load circuit and close a light emitter circuit
10 that visually indicates current overload and being reset to
11 reestablish a closed circuit.

12 Another object of the invention provides a circuit
13 interrupter including a snap-action multi-metallic heat reactive
14 strip being reset and used in miniature circuitry in confining
15 spaces.

16 Another object of the invention is to provide a
17 circuit interrupter including a temperature-sensitive snap-
18 action multi-metal strip to produce a visual indication of a
19 fault condition by a lamp and being capable of being reset.

20 Another object is to provide a compact circuit interrupter
21 device adaptable to miniaturization and having a multi-metallic
22 heat reactive strip being snapped to open a load circuit and
23 close a light emitter circuit to visually indicate current
24 overload and capable of being reset to reestablish a closed
25 circuit without spring loading structure of present circuit
26 breaker designs.

1 These and other objects of the invention will become more
2 readily apparent from the ensuing specification when taken in
3 conjunction with the appended claims.

4 Accordingly, the present invention is a circuit interrupter
5 for indicating and removing overload current from a load. A
6 snap action multi-metallic heat reactive strip snaps from
7 coupling current to a load circuit to a light emitter circuit
8 when a predetermined magnitude of excessive, or overload current
9 heats the multi-metal heat reactive strip. An indicator lamp in
10 the light emitting circuit provides a visual indication of the
11 overload condition. A manual push button engages the multi-
12 metal heat reactive strip to reset and snap the strip back to
13 coupling power to the load.

14 15 BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

16 A more complete understanding of the invention and many of
17 the attendant advantages thereto will be readily appreciated as
18 the same becomes better understood by reference to the following
19 detailed description when considered in conjunction with the
20 accompanying drawings wherein like reference numerals refer to
21 like parts and wherein:

22 FIG. 1 is a schematic circuit diagram showing the multi-
23 metallic heat reactive strip of the circuit interrupter device
24 of the invention connecting current to a load during a normal
25 operating condition.

FIG. 2 is a schematic circuit diagram showing the multi-metallic heat reactive strip of the circuit interrupter device of the invention connected to an indicator light in a light emitting circuit during a snapped, or tripped condition; and

FIGS. 3A, 3B, and 3C schematically show side, top, and bottom views of the package of the interrupter circuit device of the invention.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

Referring to FIGS. 1 and 2 of the drawings, circuit interrupter device 10 of this invention is coupled to a load circuit 20 to conduct current 22 from a source of electrical power 24 through electronic/electrical components and assemblies of a load 26. Circuit interrupter device 10 prevents excessive, or overload currents in load circuit 20 from damaging the constituents of load 26 and, snaps to a light emitter circuit 30 of circuit interrupter device 10 that gives a visual indication that an overload current condition exists in load circuit 20.

Circuit interrupter device 10 can be made in rectangularly-shaped modularized packages from off-the-shelf components and has elongate electrodes 11 that fit into mating sockets 21 of load circuit 20. When electrodes 11 are plugged into sockets 21, a conductor section 12 and a multi-metallic heat reactive strip 14 of circuit interrupter device 10 complete, or close load circuit 20.

1 Multi-metallic heat reactive strip 14 snaps from one shape
2 to another shape when a current that exceeds a predetermined
3 magnitude is coupled to it and heats it sufficiently to cause
4 its heat stressed condition to snap, or trip it to another
5 shape. Heat reactive strips are well known and some widely used
6 disc shaped strips have been formed in domed-shapes that snap to
7 inverted domed-shaped configurations in response to changes in
8 temperature. The simplicity of discs and their ease of
9 manufacture are contributing factors for their widespread use.
10 Accordingly, a disc-shaped multi-metallic heat reactive strip 14
11 can be made by pressing a flat disc of multi-metallic heat
12 reactive material between steel dies until it assumes a desired
13 domed configuration. Other shapes for multi-metallic heat
14 reactive strip 14 can be made, such as rectangular or tongue-
15 shaped, for examples, as different applications may require.

16 The dome-shaped multi-metallic heat reactive strip 14 of
17 circuit interrupter device 10 along with conductor section 12
18 normally completes a closed circuit for current 22 from
19 electrical power source 24 through electronic/electrical
20 components and assemblies that make up load 26. This is the
21 normal operating condition shown in FIG. 1.

22 When, however, dome-shaped multi-metallic heat reactive
23 strip 14 becomes heated by current 22 that increases to
24 excessive, or overload levels for one reason or another, multi-
25 metallic heat reactive strip 14 is quickly stressed by the heat
26 generated. The stresses generated by heating multi-metallic heat

1 reactive strip 14 to the heated condition by currents that
2 exceed a predetermined overload magnitude create the only forces
3 used to snap multi-metallic heat reactive strip 14 into an
4 inverted dome shape. The stressed multi-metallic heat reactive
5 strip 14 that has snapped to the inverted dome shape opens load
6 circuit 20 and virtually simultaneously closes light emitter
7 circuit 30, see FIG. 2. Since the now-closed light emitter
8 circuit 30 has an indicator lamp 32 serially connected to a
9 current limiting resistor 34, indicator lamp 32 provides an
10 immediate visual indication that an overload condition has been
11 created in load circuit 20 and that load circuit 20 is open.

12 Circuit interrupter device 10 provides a fusing function as
13 described above that is clearly, visually indicated for
14 appropriate action. However, circuit interrupter device 10 of
15 this invention has a reset capability after cooling from its
16 heated condition for reactivation of load circuit 20 with
17 acceptable levels of current 22. In other words, the light
18 radiating from indicator lamp 32 will draw an operator's
19 attention to load circuit 20 and appropriate action will be
20 taken in regard to correcting or ignoring the excessive levels
21 of current. Ignoring and resetting may be the right procedure,
22 when, for example, a non-damaging, isolated stray transient
23 current may have been created by a single isolated, non-
24 repeatable incident.

25 After circuit interrupter 10 has cooled below the snap-
26 action temperature of its heated condition, an operator pushes-

1 in a push-button 16 of a reset push button mechanism 18 of
2 circuit interrupter device 10 in the indicated arrow direction
3 18a to reset it. This reset is accomplished by displacing the
4 inverted dome shape of multi-metallic heat reactive strip 14 via
5 push button 16 until multi-metallic heat reactive strip 14 snaps
6 to its previous dome shape as shown in FIG. 1. The snapped
7 multi-metallic heat reactive strip 14 opens light emitter
8 circuit 30 to extinguish indicator lamp 32 by isolating it from
9 power source 24 and virtually simultaneously closes load circuit
10 20 to permit its reactivation.

11 Under normal conditions, current 22 is within acceptable
12 limits and circuit interrupter device 10 allows current 22 to
13 flow through load 26, and light emitter circuit 30 is isolated
14 from power source 24. When multi-metallic heat reactive strip
15 14 is tripped by increased overload levels of current 22, it
16 snaps quickly to open load circuit 20, close light emitter
17 circuit 30 through current limiting resistor 34 and light
18 indicator lamp 32. Once tripped, multi-metallic heat reactive
19 strip 14 remains in the tripped condition due to its physical
20 properties. Manually depressing push button 16 of push button
21 mechanism 18 is required to return multi-metallic heat reactive
22 strip 14 to its normal operating condition.

23 Circuit interrupter device 10 usually is reset by pressing
24 and releasing reset push button 16 once multi-metallic heat
25 reactive strip 14 has cooled below its snap action temperature.
26 Optionally, multi-metallic heat reactive strip 14 can be reset

1 in place as circuit interrupter device 10 is connected to load
2 circuit 20, or circuit interrupter device 10 can be removed from
3 load circuit 20 by pulling electrodes 11 from sockets 21, and
4 strip 14 is reset. Then, circuit interrupter device 10 is
5 returned and plugged into sockets 21 when the overload condition
6 that caused the trip has been fixed.

7 Circuit interrupter device 10 can be modularized and
8 miniaturized by current technologies in a compact
9 environmentally resistant housing 40 as depicted in the side,
10 top, and bottom views depicted in FIGS. 3A, 3B, and 3C,
11 respectively. First and second electrodes 11 extend from the
12 bottom of housing 40 and manual push button 16 of reset push
13 button mechanism 18 and indicator lamp 32 of light emitter
14 circuit 30 are prominently located to extend outwardly from the
15 top surface. Selection of components from among contemporary
16 fast acting miniature multi-metallic strips, miniature light
17 emitting devices, and other constituents and interfacing them in
18 compact rugged modular housing 40 for a job at hand can be
19 readily done without requiring anything beyond ordinary skill.

20 Circuit interrupter device 10 of this invention can be
21 fabricated compact enough to be used in many miniature circuit
22 applications such as those found in automobile electrical
23 systems, test instruments, domestic appliances and many other
24 electronic/electrical circuits. Circuit interrupter device 10
25 answers the need for miniature fusing in tight, confining spaces
26 and/or assemblies that have unusual shapes that restrict access.

1 It also greatly reduces the problems inherent in the circuit
2 breakers and fuse arrangements of the prior art that are
3 associated with identifying overloaded circuits and tripped
4 fusing devices in crowded, tight, or hard-to-get-at fuse panels,
5 particularly under low light conditions. Additional benefits
6 from using multi-metallic heat reactive strips 14 of the
7 invention of circuit interrupter device 10 are that the fusing,
8 status indicating, and resetting functions are performed without
9 reliance on complicated and bulky spring loading structures like
10 those used in many contemporary circuit breaker designs. Thus,
11 circuit interrupter device 10 can be made more compactly and is
12 further capable of miniaturization to help assure higher
13 reliability for more of the tighter arrangements of
14 electronic/electrical components and assemblies.

15 The disclosed components and their arrangements as
16 disclosed herein all contribute to the novel features of this
17 invention. Circuit interrupter device 10 of this invention
18 provides a reliable and cost-effective means to improve the
19 reliability and responsive operation of many electronic and
20 electrical assemblies. Therefore, circuit interrupter device 10
21 as disclosed herein is not to be construed as limiting, but
22 rather, is intended to be demonstrative of this inventive
23 concept.

24 It will be understood that many additional changes in the
25 details, materials, steps and arrangement of parts, which have
26 been herein described and illustrated in order to explain the

1 nature of the invention, may be made by those skilled in the art
2 within the principle and scope of the invention as expressed in
3 the appended claims.